

CHAPTER 4

MAID'S ROOM: THE BLURRED IDENTITY OF LIVE-IN MAIDS

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is born out of concern about the perception of the physical and symbolic place of the live-in housekeeper, both in socioeconomic, and historical terms, as well as the architectural and social dynamics of the home. An intersectional and teleological analysis of the intrinsic devaluation of paid social reproduction work is carried out, based mainly on gender, race, and class inequalities. Ultimately, the chapter tries to locate the position in which the maid finds herself in the domestic environment, both in family relationships and in the symbolism inherent to the concept of the maid's room. Based on sociological, philosophical, and anthropological analysis, the ambiguous place of domestic workers becomes clearer, promoting a reflection on the very concept of family and household. Thus, the chapter proposes to achieve a hermeneutic dive into the experience of this working class, revealing a hierarchical system beyond the socioeconomic, but above all, of their subjectivities.

Keywords: Social reproduction work; family; housekeeper; intersectionality; maid's room

Since I was seven years old, I have been looking for a place to park and say: here I am fine!

—Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Casa de Alvenaria* (1961, p. 19)

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INTRODUCTION

The social distancing and isolation policies imposed by the health crisis, brought to light many issues hidden by the privacy of the home in times of normal functioning of society. In this way, the doors and windows of domestic environments were opened, exposing the structures of oppression and particular vulnerabilities to this scenario.

The humanitarian crises arising from COVID-19 posed an especially great threat to girls and women. However, the pandemic further pushed away the perception of the girl group as a homogeneous concept, exposing the intragroup differences which show that while everyone is navigating the same turbulent waters of the health crisis, the vessels available to each one were quite different. Some with their fortified boats resistant to big waves, others paddling alone fighting with only the strength of their bodies, while there are still those adrift in this storm.

A symbol of this inequality in positions amid gender oppression was the occurrence of one of the first cases of COVID in Brazil in 2020, namely Cleonice Gonçalves, a maid who performed her duties in an apartment in one of the most expensive neighborhoods not only in Brazil but of the world. Her employer, a woman from the highest classes of society, had just returned from a trip abroad and brought the virus with her in her luggage. The woman did not inform the employee, who contracted the virus and without access to health support, like her employer, ended up passing away (Gram Slattery, 2020).

Using the example of this case as a starting point for the reflections proposed in this article, we seek to locate the position of the live-in maid in the family dynamics. The intersection of elements of the home architecture itself, and of the maid's room in this scenario, with the affective element, and recognition of the individual and social identity of this character, is the backbone for the research. We seek to reveal the following question: In what spatial and symbolic terms does the existence of this woman take place?

METHODOLOGY

The methodological strategy outlined for the development of the research consisted primarily of a thorough bibliographical review, regarding multidimensional and intersectional inequality in terms of labor, gender, class, and race. This chapter is carried out by applying the triangulation of concepts and data sources, articulating the conceptual deepening of theories of gender, division of labor, race, and intersectionality, with the historical path of the maid's function in the world, since the period of slavery, adding the contribution of excerpts from interviews among the domestic workers themselves and their employers.

The research resorts to the support of images to complement the development of the work. First, in the form of paintings from the 19th century, inserted to allow a look inside the domestic environment at the time, instead of just textual descriptions by third parties. In this way, it is intended to promote a critical

reflection of the reader, through the interpretation of the tables according to their own structure of values and concepts.

The second stage of using visual content consists of sharing photographs taken in the city of Rio de Janeiro, where the socio-historical and architectural practice of the maid's room is still very present. The photos were taken without any alteration to the space, aiming at a faithful view of the multiple functions that the smallest room in the house performs in the dynamics of the home.

The use of images is supported by Classen's (1997) and Synnot's (1992) assertion that vision is "the privileged channel for the perception of the world, for the sharing of information and the construction of cultural meaning," thus being one more asset in the intention of dissecting the sociocultural reality. With the images, it is intended to unveil and clarify the interrelationship between agents and social practice (Bourdieu et al., 2001).

The last element to be included, but as essential as the others to the objective of this chapter, is the analytical lenses of the structural organization of the house itself, and the architectural logic of exclusion.

Using content coding tools, the research follows the paths that lead to the collision axes vulnerabilities. The intersectional perspective stems from the recognition of the limitation of unitary and multiple approaches, which muffle the voices of individuals who live at the intersections of these vulnerabilities. Through this perception, the research applies the intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989; Lutz, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2011) emphasizing the intersection of multiple forms of oppression and privilege, considering the relationship between categories "an open empirical question" (Hancock, 2007, p. 72).

In summary, the theoretical-methodological design of the research was born from the search for illuminating the hidden aspects of the problem, devoting attention to the process of formation and reinforcement of a culture of exclusion, or of privilege, which spreads through "acts and speeches, but also of silences and prohibitions (...)" (Lopes, 2003, p. 139).

It is at this moment, in the *Zeitgeist* of the theme of inclusion, and by understanding the school as an environment of a constant dispute of narratives, or, in other words, spaces where norms are produced, reproduced, and disseminated in societies, an intersectional approach is made as a tool of great analytical value. It is necessary to paint a picture with heuristic brushes, where these multiple identities meet, forming a new image different from the one traditionally visualized in studies of unitary or multiple strands (Hancock, 2007).

THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR

Social reproduction work, understood as tasks related to care, encompasses, according to Tronto (1998), "everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in the best possible way" (p. 40). Some important voices in the dissemination of the term in academia, as well as outside of it, are Selma James, creator of the term "unwaged," to describe unpaid

and mostly female care work, and coauthor of the book *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1973) with Italian Marxist feminist and activist Mariarosa Dalla Costa. The text opened doors to the debate about domestic work, removing the facade of “housewife function,” to theorize all the invisible effort necessary to maintain the capitalist system, reinforcing the concept of the political potential of the private sphere in the socioeconomic ordering of societies.

Another voice of great power both epistemologically and in activism for remuneration and recognition of care work is Silvia Federici (1975). Feminist, philosopher, and professor based in the USA, Federici articulates themes such as colonialism, globalization, and the precariousness of work, with the domination of the body and female experiences in the capitalist world. In her work *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), the professor reveals the inseparable trajectory between the control of the female body and mind throughout history, with the possibility of expansion of the capitalist system on the globe. She points to the witch-hunts as the master symbol of this ideology, accompanying all stages of economic and technological development of humanity.

The key objective of these authors was to bring to the discussion all the work involved in care and social reproduction, and traditionally made invisible precisely because of its non-inclusion in the remunerated labor category. The authors aimed to overcome the notion of this work as linked only to the function of raising children, exposing all the work necessary for the maintenance and development of the workforce and human capital available in society. Such tasks generate a collision zone of demands, both emotional and physical, intertwining the women’s personal and social identity, and their life path possibilities, with the sexist demands of guaranteeing continuity of the dominant socio-economic system.

In the hierarchical scheme of social values, the gender aspect represents one of the social categorization pillars, favoring individuals belonging to the male group to the detriment of the female, in all terms of life, including, and especially, work. Depending on this division, paths and functions of greater profitability are directed to the prioritized group, earning them greater power, relevance, production, and participation in the public sphere. As for women, the offer of possibilities tends to fall into functions considered subaltern, such as reproduction, emotional, care, and life support (Espinar, 2007; Zambrini, 2014).

The sexual division of labor sustains itself on the constitution of a ranking of genders and their respective roles. Thus, the functions delegated to women lead to harder and devalued work, and most of the time being considered as a “help,” while men are delegated careers outside the family production unit, in the public sphere, focused on functions of greater importance, prestige and aimed at the goods and services market.

Argentine sociologist Carlos Hasenbalg (2005) proposes yet another layer of complexity, indicating a structural determination of classes in the social division of labor, responsible for the reproduction of social classes. In this conception, certain works would naturally be directed to certain individuals, according to sexual, racial, and cultural aspects.

Thus, “some people will naturally be directors of large companies, while others will have to permanently occupy the place of domestic servants” (Odair Furtado, 2020, p. 359).

An excerpt from the book *Education, Poverty and Social Inequality* from the University of Brasília (2020) accurately reports the size of this inequality, “That is, women contribute to the formation of the wealth of nations in productive work with lower remuneration than men and in reproductive work free of charge, with work made invisible, or culturally naturalized.” The perversity of the sexual division of labor is due to the invisibility of the place where it occurs and the progressive numbness of women, its main victims. Through this division, there is an unfair and costly distribution of domestic and care work for them.

The sociologist María Ángeles Durán designed a behavioral model associated with traditional gender roles in terms of the dynamics of domestic management, as shown in Fig. 1.

Shaped by the model shown in Fig. 1, women are responsible for more than 3/4 of unpaid social reproduction tasks and 2/3 of paid care work (OXFAM, *Time do Care*, 2020). In this scenario, Nelly P. Stromquist (2014) also underlines the intersection of class, distinguishing that families from the poorest strata of society tend to position girls and women as secondary in the family finances decision-making process. Especially in traditionally patrilineal societies, boys are considered as the providers who will guarantee the future of the family, attributing to girls the position of “transient member” of the household. Girls are viewed as domestic and economic assets, who should be transferred to the husband’s family context, bri public sphere both in the present (maintenance of the workforce and care) and in the future (healthily creating new generations). Reinforcing the idea that the “personal is political,” as Carol Hanisch stated in the 1960s, and affirming that the expansion of this perception is done by politicizing the private.

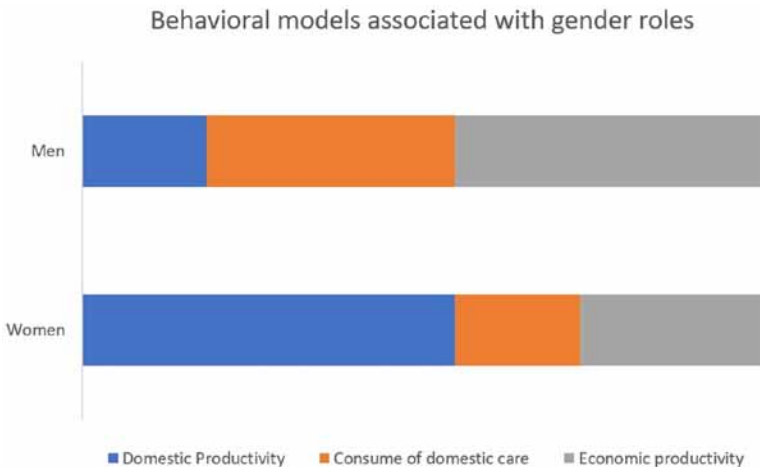


Fig. 1. Concentration and Distribution of Unpaid Work in Households: Behavioral Models Associated with Gender Roles. *Source:* Durán (2000).

It is worth pointing out that even among a marginalized and oppressed group, there are different layers of subjugation. Among women, there is an active form of hierarchization, such as the transfer of care work from one to the other (Orozco, 2014).

When gender, class, and race intersect, there is a kind of horizontal hierarchy among women.

The figure that traditionally represents this overload of demands has many names: Housekeeper, the help, housemaid, caregiver, or maid. Be that as it may, all of these names can be translated as the ones that “have undergone a reinforcement process regarding the internalization of difference, of inferiority, of subordination. However, it was she who made possible and still makes possible the economic and cultural emancipation of the mistress within the double shift system” (Gonzalez, 2020, p. 58).

The naturalization of domestic work as the responsibility of women with certain characteristics is the guiding thread in the elaboration of the arguments developed throughout this chapter. To this end, it is important to contextualize this labor category historically, and socioculturally, culminating in the perception of their presence spatially and geographically. Therefore, in addition to the room in which this woman lives, it is worth understanding her place as a subject in society.

THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF PAID DOMESTIC WORK

The Convention 189 of the International Labor Organization on domestic workers defines this labor category as the

work performed in or for a home or homes. Therefore, domestic work is explained based on the place of work, which consists of the private home. In general terms, domestic workers provide care to other people and perform multiple tasks to maintain the home.

Tasks considered as domestic work may vary from one country to the other, but includes activities as: cooking, cleaning, caring for children, elderly, and disabled adults, taking care of the garden or domestic animals, carrying out shopping or driving the family car. Domestic workers may work part-time, full-time or hourly, and may reside in the household for which they work or reside outside that household. (p. 9)

The relegation of domestic work to less well-off classes in society, especially women, is a practice found throughout history. Especially after the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of capitalism, which implemented the growing ideology of housework as inferior to the work done in the public sphere. With the structuring of social classes, women from the middle and upper classes began to entrust the arduous tasks of the home to women from lower classes, thus obtaining from this dynamic a reinforcement of their own status and that of their family.

With the passage of time and the waves of demographic changes resulting from the massive entry of women into the work environment, the view on domestic

work has changed in some ways. Women burdened by the “second shift” or the “never ending working day,” operating as “superwoman” (Enloe, 2000), begin to rely on the work of domestic servants to manage the environment in which they no longer have the time to manage themselves. To such a degree, the current figure of the maid acquires new and multiple functions, in this new context in which she is the one who conducts the home most of the day, without the presence of the old figure of the “housewife.”

Currently, there are an estimated 75.6 million domestic workers in the world. Of these, 76.2 million are women, or only $\frac{1}{4}$ of workers in this field are men (ILO, 2021). The ILO also states that of this total, 8.6 million are individuals under 15 years of age, among which 80% are women. Other data provides an insight into the precariousness of the profession, with 77.5% of women in the Latin American region working in the domestic sector informally, in addition to having a three times higher propensity to live in poverty than other workers (ILO, 2020).

The very definition of domestic work for authors such as Bergman (1986), hooks (1984), Gove and Tudor (1973), and Bernard (1972) brings with its stigmas of invisibility, a devalued nature, with no possibility of rewards, both financially and psychologically, and as profoundly isolating. The context of this work is still inserted in a frame that would not promote human development and autonomy. It also points out the division between the perceptions inherent to the service and care work. Delphy (1984), Mackie and Pattullo (1977), and Speakman and Marchington (1999) highlight that these conscious or unconscious interpretations link the idea of “service” to subordination, and care or management to an aspect with greater merit and control.

It is also important to mark the emotional aspect involved in care, particularly in this new configuration, in which these women are often responsible for their employer's children, as they have been more dedicated to the public environment, as well as the elderly in the household or people with some kind of special needs. Placed on these reflections, the usual concept of family can be questioned.

The concept traditionally consists of: “all those people who are linked to you genealogically or who you otherwise define as kin” (Schneider, 2014; Silva & Smart, 1999), or, as proposed by the US Census Bureau “family are those with whom I live and with whom I participate in a domestic economy.” The restlessness of this chapter comes mainly in the sense of workers residing in the home where they work, and what would be their place of belonging in these concepts of family and household, not just in the architectural aspect of the house, but also amidst the family dynamics and rituals.

The fact that domestic work only emerged as a topic of interest in the social sciences in the 1970s indicates it is still incipient. Only in the last two decades has the discussion acquired more layers of interpretation (Kofes, 1982; Saffioti, 1979). Between these new levels of analysis, the articulation between gender, race, and class becomes fundamental for understanding the sphere where domestic work is interpolated. This investigative magnifying glass is called intersectionality.

THE PLACE WHERE THE EXES OF OPPRESSION MEET

The state of the art around inequality studies, based on income, access to material resources, and social classes is quite dense. Withal, emerging forms of inequality are increasingly manifesting as a product of migratory processes, dynamics of urban and rural housing, and the development of the discussion on sexualities and diversity in family formations. In the movement caused by these changes, subordinated identities are beginning to appear on the surface, although still in quite marginal positions.

The expansion of societies, and the notion of the diverse identity markers that the same individual may hold, demand “scholars to adopt a significantly more nuanced research approach that avoids the shortsighted perception of individuals as possessing only one identity marker and takes the socio-historical gravity of a society into account” (Bešić, 2020, p. 114).

With the intention of seeing identities beyond a monolithic vision, the intersectional approach and method is inserted as a way of exploring multidimensional identities, seeking to remove the myopia of unitary studies, assuming different questions capable of resulting in also different answers.

According to (Bešić, 2020) intersectionality is a concept that converges two traditionally bifurcated paths: on the one hand, the differentiations between individual identities, while paying attention to the discourse and social structures of power that lubricate and maintain the machine of inequalities operant. It then makes it possible to appreciate the complexity of social dynamics, without reducing them, culminating in a perception that goes beyond the neutrality and immutability of these phenomena, which cross individual experiences and determine them in this process.

The concept of intersectionality has been part of academic reflections for some time, since its emergence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, concomitant with the expansion of multiracial feminist studies (Thompson, 2002). It originally comes from a critique of classical radical feminism, with its inherently Eurocentric, classicist, and white tendencies. This line of studies begins to rethink the concept of gender, challenging “the notion that ‘gender’ was the main determining factor in a woman’s destiny” (hooks, 1984), which became known as revisionist feminist theory.

Even though the concept originally emerged to address the relationship between race and gender issues (Crenshaw, 1989; Gonzalez, 2020), it can be stretched to expose other forms of interaction of vulnerabilities that feed back to each other. The “female destiny” (hooks, 1984) is understood as the result of the combination of several factors, mainly race, gender, and class, and not a direct consequence only of the gender order linked to women. The motto “the personal is political,” as addressed, became representative of many feminist struggles. The “slogan” indicates that experiences considered particularly feminine, and often private, are part of a web of broader relationships and power hierarchies, in which the experience of women does not represent an isolated outcome, but a direct product of these shocks and interactions.

As Sirma Bilge (2009) states, intersectionality is a transdisciplinary theory that highlights the complexity and overlapping of identities through an integrated perspective,

It refutes the enclosure and hierarchization of the great axes of social differentiation that are the categories of sex/gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, disability, and sexual orientation. The intersectional approach goes beyond the simple recognition of the multiplicity of the oppression systems that operate from these categories and postulates their interaction in the production and reproduction of social inequalities. (p. 89)

It appears that the identities shaped amid this chronic inequality, end up suffering a mixture of characteristics and positions in the social structure, a result of both negotiation of their role in social stratification and of the erasure of parts of their personal identity to adapt the socioeconomic demands of the socioeconomic structure that surrounds it. The look at the axes of identity markers, and their negotiations according to the flow of power established, allows the contestation of the “naturalization of any construction of social divisions, and challenge the prioritization of any of them, such as class and gender” (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 166).

Seeking to understand the production and reproduction of social inequalities, Heleieth Saffioti (2004) emphasizes the existing symbiosis between different types of discrimination, which culminate in a patriarchal-racist-capitalist knot. For her, there is a dialectical relationship between these axes, which in this process of metamorphosis become the greatest catalyst for inequality. The architectural historian Gülsüm Bayda complements Saffioti by stating that the perception of the nuclear family unit is not universal, and in this sense, it would not be possible to understand the dynamics of the home without the intersectional perspective of actors such as domestic workers in this family context (Botto, 2021, p. 33).

GENDER AND REPRODUCTION LABOR

The conceptualization of gender proposed by Rosa Cobo (1995) reiterates that gender symbolizes a social construction that transforms the differences between the sexes into economic, social, and political inequalities. This definition concerns not only what societies attribute to each sex, but essentially involves the conversion of sexual distinctions into inequalities (Cobo, 2020). Belonging to this spectrum, Sharma (2008) argues that female autonomy and subjectivities should not be considered as a unified identity, but rather a cluster of empowerments arising from copious tensions and localized manifestations (DeJaeghere & Lee, 2011).

In practice, social discourse, understood as defined by Lélia Gonzalez (2020), “in terms of mental social representations that are reinforced and reproduced in different ways” (Gonzalez; Lima & Rios, 2020, p. 42), it is responsible for determining the perception of gender roles. Although the feminist waves, and the theoretical and practical effort to reformulate this discourse, very little has changed regarding the definition of women, particularly in the domestic environment.

Considering that domestic chores are part of the formulating characteristics of the female identity, it was then a feature naturally added to the new responsibilities and roles of women as competent and dedicated professionals outside the house. In that way, the demographic transition, and the impact of women's liberation from some of the sexist constraints through feminist movements, did

not represent a substantial change in her identity as a hole in society. All family and home obligations continue to be attributed essentially to women, which confirms that the inclusion of this new role of them in the public sphere was, in fact, an expansion of their attributions before this social transition, and not a real change (Rocha-Coutinho, 2004).

The assumption of many social policies, affirming the home as a mark of homogeneity and regularity, proves to be an erroneous concept. Since the domestic environment is still a predominantly feminine space, it can be identified that we also observe areas of inequality in them. In an article published in 2022 on the Movimento dos Sem Terra in Brazil online platform, Conceição Amorim, a specialist in the Management of Public Policies on Gender and Race, emphasizes gender hierarchy in the domestic environment,

It is said in this culture that a good mother, a good wife, a good sister, a good woman does not give up her space of power, and the center of this power is between the kitchen and the service area.

It appears that these so-called “crystal walls” (Lima, 2021), invisible barriers that fragment the human development of girls and women, install themselves in disparate positions according to racial, cultural, and class characteristics. Women belonging to the dominant groups in society, traditionally white, with higher education and from upper economic classes, tend to be raised to be the backbone of the home, and find their crystal walls more present only in the public sphere, in issues mainly related to the labor market and sociopolitical dynamics. Marginalized women, on the other hand, face their walls since childhood, often playing secondary roles within their own homes, growing up in locations far from the centers of power, and witnessing the constant reinforcement of this subjugation in every social sphere through which they transit.

In such a manner, returning to Botto (2021), it is essential to add fluidity to the analysis of the private space of the home, especially regarding the gender aspect, since, as conceived as a social construction, unique femininities, and masculinities can be forged within different contexts. The controversial writer and poet Marguerite Duras wrote that the conception of a home is “an activity that has nothing to do with men. They can build houses, but they can’t make homes” (1990, p. 50).

By uniting these two views, the fluidity of family research, and the distinction between the structural aspect of the house, and the more profound and symbolic sense of the home, a basis is established for questioning the subdivision of domestic work based on social relations within the division of sexual and racial work.

THE COLOR OF GENDER AMBIVALENCE

Traditional feminist waves throughout history have largely been based on the struggle for rights linked to freedom of participation in the public sphere, and for that, often neglecting the burden of domestic work, or determining the theme as secondary in the

agenda of liberal feminist struggles. However, as Afrofeminism and decolonial feminism demonstrate, these movements ended up consolidating class and racial divisions among women, thus substantiating the very structures of oppression.

Historically, white women managed to climb some steps in the social ladder, relying on the work of racialized and marginalized women. Whether in the period of slavery with the compulsory assignment of these women or in the subsequent extension of this labor category for them. Thus, in a way, white women played an accomplice role in the reproduction of patriarchal structures that operate as oppressors of all women.

Lelia Gonzalez deals in depth with the interconnection of black women with the role of domestic servant throughout her career. The author reports this connection tracing from the slavery period, going beyond the abolition to the idea of the “mucama” or that “house maid.” The sociologist highlights the separation of physical spaces, between the main house, or the “big house,” representing the place where the enslaved women carried out their duties, and the slave quarters, consisting of the communal space where the enslaved people slept and gathered to socialize. However, even though this is the origin of such a process, the causes of racial inequalities should not be sought only in the past, as they also operate in the present, as stated by Argentinian sociologist Carlos Hasenbalg (1982).

As follows, the social place of the black woman in the racial division of work, the anonymity of everyday life and even of her agency, got cemented in the social imaginary.

This heritage consolidated the perception of her as a “load horse carrying her family and the others on her shoulders” (Gonzalez, 2020, p. 199). To this conceptualization, Aníbal Quijano (2005) reaffirms the association of the formulation of historical identities with the roles and places systematically assigned in the world structure of work.

The two images below allow us to reflect on this ambivalence inserted in the same group so-called the female gender. First is Fig. 2, the painting made by Jean-Baptiste Debret, called *Dinner* (1820), when commissioned to portray life in the Brazilian colony in the early 19th century. The double subordination of the black woman can be witnessed, considering that even in the absence of the white man's presence, her position remains predetermined, without any social mobility, and subordinated to the white woman.

The white woman doesn't stop to be subjugated in the sexist shackles, but she is still privileged in terms of race. It is thus fulfilling the functions of the “big house,” and the desires and demands of the white woman.

In Fig. 3, taken by photographer João Valadares, from the newspaper *Correio Braziliense* in 2016, the presence of this crystal wall between the women in the painting is almost physically noticeable. While the white woman delegates the arduous task of caring for the small child, and can thus walk with her partner, her domestic employee, with the added functions of the nanny, is responsible for walking the child.

To this image, historian André Roberto de A. Machado adds: “The white uniform is a striking mark of distinction in that context, which is complemented by the employee's slight retreat from the bosses” (Machado, 2016).



Fig. 2. A Lady of Some Means in Her House, One of J-B Debret's Watercolors During His Trip to Brazil from DEBRET, Jean-Baptiste, Picturesque and Historical Journey to Brazil, São Paulo 1816–1831. Source: Wikimedia Commons and Creative Commons (2017).



Fig. 3. Claudio Pracownik with His Family in a Political Demonstration in Ipanema. Photo: Reproduction/Facebook and João Valadares, Correio Braziliense (2016). Source: VEJA, Imagem da Semana. Foto – João Valadares/CB/D.A.Press; Capa: André Coelho/AG. O Globo.

These two images reveal the depth of the racial division roots in the spatial organization of society, composed of the natural place of the white person versus the congenital place of the black person, beyond the bounds of the natural position of man versus the natural position of woman.

Another possible reflection in the two images refers to what Leila Gonzalez named the figure of the “black mother.” She defines that stereotype as the affectionate, harmless figure, with no apparent agency of resistance to the instituted power, exercising especially maternal functions for the children of the upper and white classes. However, the author encourages the analysis of this woman’s essential role in the historical-cultural construction of society, through the transmission of values and beliefs that shape their own culture (Gonzalez, 2020, p. 205).

Suely Kofes (1994) points out that this double standard in the relationship between “employers” and “employees” occurs because the mistress wants to maintain her position as head of house management, while she needs and demands that the maid performs the domestic functions that she herself is unable or unwilling to perform. To this end, the boss uses instruments that “walk towards affirming one of the women as an employee (in the feminine) and the boss as a woman” (Koffes, 1994, p. 138).

Over time, and the demographic changes resulting from capitalist expansion and the strengthening of world centers around which the economy revolves, domestic work has acquired a face beyond that of black women, also presenting features of immigrant women, especially the racialized ones. Today, of the approximately 76 million domestic workers worldwide (ILO, 2022), it is estimated that one out of six (17%) is an international migrant worker (ILO Global Estimates on Migrant Workers, 2015).

The systematic subordination did not happen by chance, as Judith Rollins points out,

The types of the economic system that institutionalized inequality are varied, however, all of them involve interpersonal rituals of behavior, which in a certain way, reinforce for entire categories of the population the desire to accept the forms, uses, and meanings of these interpersonal rituals that take place. expressed in the relationships between black housemaids and their white bosses. (Rollins, 1990, p. 63)

As important as realizing this confluence of gender and race in the investigation of the role and position of housemaids, it must be considered the third major element of fragility in this scenario, the social class bias of these women.

CLASS AND THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

The term “feminization of poverty,” coined by Diana Pearce, was conceived only in the 1970s, which proves the delay in studies articulating poverty and gender, even for feminist epistemologies. The designation of the term facilitated the perception of the intersection of poverty and the issue of gender, which was later studied by other authors and expanded as a social phenomenon in almost all the western territories.

The [United Nations Development Fund for Women \(UNIFEM, 1995\)](#) points out four key aspects capable of indicating the increase in poverty among women: Temporal, Spatial, Segmentation of work, and Valorization. All these elements can be found when observing the reality of domestic workers.

However, for this chapter, it is worth paying special attention to the last two. The segmentation refers to the vision of women as natural caregivers, conditioning them to a position of submission, both in the private and public spheres. As for the concept of valuation, or more specifically, the lack of it, it refers to the perception of lesser value in the functions performed by women in the domestic environment.

Even when domestic workers are compared with other demographically similar professions, in the US alone, the former has 14% more evidence of living in poverty (Julia Wolfe, 2020). About 55% of housekeepers live in the so-called “twicepoverty” or “Families with incomes between the poverty line and twice the poverty line (or *twice poverty*) are barely making ends meet, but they are not considered officially poor” ([Saylor Foundation, 2016](#), p. 39). This demonstrates that even in clearer metrics, sorted by quantitative data, how intricate it is to measure the degree of deprivation that certain groups experience.

To portray how “reproductive” functions have been socially distributed, according to hierarchies of class, race, ethnic groups, and gender, Shellee Colen, in her groundbreaking 1986 study around West Indian nannies and their (female) employers in New York City, develops the concept of stratified reproduction, introducing the transnational dimension of these relationships. The term brings to light the social, economic, and political forces that operate as enforcers of hierarchies that perpetuate inequalities, in a feedback system ([Colen, 1995](#)).

Silvia Federici (2017) shows that primitive accumulation, in addition to the salaried industrial proletariat, as Marx claimed, also took place in the sphere of social reproduction work. Just as within a group of the same gender, there is a hierarchy of individuals, it would not be different among the working class. The division, the result of the sum of vulnerability factors based on gender and race, makes it possible for workers to oppress others, even if they belong to the same oppressed category. A kind of compensatory mechanism (Federici, 2017, p. 119).

When perceiving this accumulation, one notices the complexity of the category of domestic servants, and how essential it is to move away from a reductionist approach to this figure, both in the organization of the home and in its social role. In this regard, Flávia [Biroli \(2018\)](#) says that “the material and ideological constraints imposed on women vary and are experienced in different ways, according to social class and race” (p. 37).

Following the same matrix of studies, Koffes (1994, 2001) carried out empirical research around the daily life of a group of Brazilians within the privacy of their households. She verified that in practical terms, the unveiling of the struggle of gender, class, and race happened in a great number of interactions. A struggle marked by contradictions, in which the emancipation of one pole (the dominant one) means the imprisonment of another, but also a struggle that synthesizes the functions that have been attributed to women for centuries: the social reproductive effort that, since the dawn of capitalism, has been placed as a female job.

To deepen the reflection on the problem proposed in this chapter, the first step was to contextualize some of the mechanisms and dynamics present in the experience of paid domestic work. Now, the study goes beyond this theoretical-conceptual framework, and questions the social web that operates between the walls of the house, and the material and figurative location of the maid in contemporary times.

LIVE-IN MAIDS – “AS IF THEY WERE FAMILY”

The maid profession is composed of a multiplicity of activities, as already discussed. Even though this labor category is extremely undervalued and exploited, there is still a subcategory of female workers who carry even more vulnerabilities: the domestic workers hired to work full-time and sleep at their employers' homes. [Enloe \(2014\)](#) disclosed that

the domestic workers most likely to be treated with the least respect and to be most vulnerable... are hired to live full time in their employer's home. They are likely to be socially cut off from other domestic workers and from people in their ethnic or national community... [and] have to leave behind their own families to take these live-in jobs. (p. 325)

These women, pushed by extreme poverty, lack of opportunities, and the hierarchization of social values within their own homes, are often sent to higher class homes with the idea of being “one less mouth to feed,” or get an income to help support the family. Thus, it is a practice that tends to perpetuate itself intergenerationally, without many possibilities to break this cycle in sight.

A limitation is imposed on the possibilities of freedom and autonomy of decision over their own lives, while having their subjectivities erased, based on views such as “intimate” as apolitical, “treat domestic work as stereotypically women's work,” “treat domestic workers' work sites as private spheres,” and “imagine that a woman doing domestic work in someone else's home is ‘just like family’” ([Enloe, 2014](#), p. 341).

The regularization of the profession, supported by laws such as Presidential Law no. 5.859, and in 1988 in Brazil, and 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act in the USA, and equivalent in Europe the C189 Decent Work for Domestic Workers in 2011, starts to determine minimum bases for the performance of these functions, such as weekly days off and time limits for work per day. However, the monitoring of these ground rules is most often performed by the employer, making it unreliable.

Another factor that indicates this form of tokenism in the laws regulating the profession is the massive informality with which work is carried out. According to the International Labor Organization, of the 75.6 million domestic workers worldwide, 61.4 million are in informal employment, a proportion twice as high as informal employment in other professions. The Organization also affirms that less than 1 in 10 domestic workers is supported by a retirement plan, and only 1 in 5 receive health insurance covered by work ([International Labour Organization, \(ILO\) 2021](#)).

Informality also creates this distorted perception of working hours, because as an additional “member” of the family, work can be considered as every waking hour. Less than 3 in every 10 informal workers work regular hours, and 42% work

more than 48 hours a week (ILO, 2021). The regulations themselves, in addition to being incipient, have loopholes that allow these legislative “blurred lines,” such as, for example, break times or days off, being mandatory under the FLSA, and therefore employers are under no obligation to allow employees to take a lunch break.

The high levels of informality, and the restriction of female workers’ agency, strengthen the negligence of employers toward their employees. Demonstrating this “limbo,” or the ambiguity forged by the idea of “being almost part of the family,” often makes the guarantee of this woman’s rights a non-priority, or often not even considered by employers. This proximity of the maid to the employing family adds another important layer of analysis about her situation, the relational process at the family home. The introduction of this remunerated figure in the family, composed of individuals with consanguinity or affective relationships, causes specific and complex tensions, as shown in Fig. 4.

THE RELATIONAL ASPECT

The deepest and most structuring relationships in an individual’s life tend to develop in the safety and privacy of the domestic space. Exploring the own concept of a house beyond its architectural features, Gaston Bachelard, in his book *Poetics of Space* (1957), argues that

In this dynamic communion of man and house, in this rivalry of house and universe, we are far from any reference to simple geometric forms. The lived house is not an inert box. The inhabited space transcends the geometric space. (p. 225)

By surpassing the physical character of the walls and rooms, a web of relationships of intimacy and trust inside the home is exposed. In this scenario,

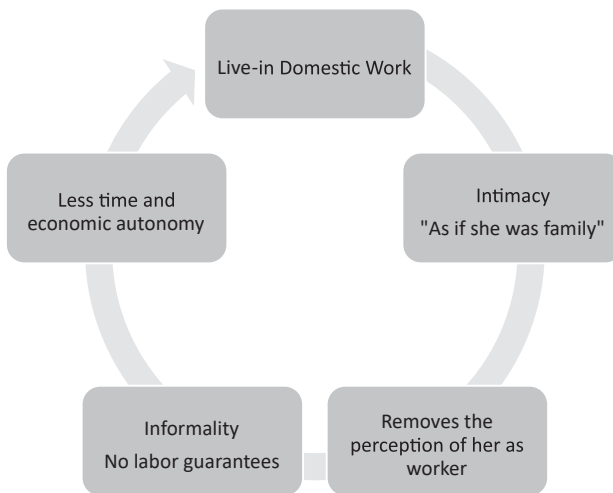


Fig. 4. The Paradox of the Live-In Domestic Worker.

the presence of the maid creates unique models of connection, and new forms of relationships.

At this point, it is important to bring Foucault's concept of microphysics of power. Consisting of a different mechanics of power, which is not so directly based on the earth and its products, but on bodies and their actions. It is a tool that "allows us to extract time and work from bodies more than goods and wealth" (Machado, 2017, p. 291). In this sense, it is important to analyze the domestic environment as a representative microcosm of the negotiations of domination and privilege in society.

Social anthropologist Jurema Brites (2007) mentions that within the common domestic interactions, it is with children that the strongest emotional bonds are created

if, in discussing cleaning, adult patrons are seen as becoming impermeable to the cultural universe of domestic workers, the same can't be said of the children. They have dialogues with the maids, listen to their stories, enjoy music together in the kitchen....in this intimacy, maids can take on the role of transmitters of knowledge. (p. 99)

Bringing back to the discussion of Lelia Gonzalez's concepts, she was a prominent voice in speaking about one of the most important figures in the historical-cultural construction of Brazilian society, the "black mother." This figure, being the one responsible for raising the children of her white bosses, both in biological aspects, but especially, in cultural, emotional, and symbolic terms, was responsible for transmitting the specific black cultural codes, shaping society. Consciously or not, she was wearing a familiar narrative that would impact on the ways of experiencing the world (Gonzalez, 2020).

Withal, ambiguity is once again present here, as it is in the blurred intimacy line between labor and affective relationships. In the chapter, *Intimate Divisions: The Maid's Room in Revolutionary Portugal*, Madalena Botto (2021) highlights

The narrative fed to the children of the wealthy patron, framing the employing family as a savior towards the underprivileged girls, the everyday sense of family established in their own close relation to the maid as a part of the family unit, and the children's' naivety concerning the realities of feeling displaced in a space that functions as your long-term home, brushes a rosy tint over this tradition.

The nuances with which these relationships are established, make this woman one of, if not the main foundation of the house. For this very reason, seeing her as a member of the family normalizes her monetary and labor devaluation, exposing the dichotomy between her position as the physical and emotional basis of the home. She is the one who guarantees the maintenance of a safe and comfortable environment for the family, in addition to the current social order. It is also her work that promotes emotional stability so that children can flourish, while providing the necessary ordering so that adults can pursue their own external urges and demands.

This miscellany of social and affective relationships, that blur this woman's identity markers, is founded upon the dependence of the presence of this figure in the home environment. However, this dependency runs parallel to a material division of the domestic space. Melt Ö. Gürel promoted a study on the architectural

heritage of the maid's room in Istanbul, seeking to expose mainly its symbolism as a reflection and propagator of the social status quo. The author then concludes that live-in domestic workers "both crystallize and accommodate the gap between social strata and between the physical space of the modern apartment and squatter housing" (Gürel, 2012, p. 24).

The surroundings create an illusion of autonomy, which, after all, has its existence limited to the space between the kitchen and the service area of the house. Family remodeling, the constant acceleration of life, technological developments, and social changes have, to some extent, also altered the use of the maid's room. It is therefore worth seeking to go beyond the perception of its practical functions, opening a line of investigation related to its allegorical aspects, as places where human existence takes place.

MAID'S ROOM – THE ARCHITECTURE OF INEQUALITY

The conception of a house goes far beyond its material configurations and architectural design. Be it a small studio with an optimized room, a large three-story house with a swimming pool, a farm with green fields and mountains all around, or a small and cramped apartment in the middle of the urban fabric. What they all represent "reveal a psychic state. The house, even more than the landscape, is a 'psychic state,' and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy" (Bachelard, 2014).

The study of the allegories inherent to the structure of the house has been a theme of psychology for a long time. All the representativeness that can be "debugged" from the perception of the home owned by everyone is a very rich psychic and emotional research resource. Psychiatrist Françoise Minkowska, along with other psychology and psychiatry scholars, departed from this notion to promote in-depth research on house designs made by children from different contexts. At the beginning of cognitive development, the house is one of the elements most replicated by children, in the form of painting and drawing, together with representations of their family and closest people.

In this regard, psychologist Anne Balif states:

Asking a child to draw his house is asking him to reveal the deepest dream shelter he has found for his happiness. If he is happy, he will succeed in drawing a snug, protected house which is well built on deeply rooted foundations. (Bachelard, 2014, p. 72)

In the *Poetics of Space*, an analysis of the physical and symbolic structures in which one inhabits and its influence in human experiences is developed. It defines the areas inside the house, between entire rooms, bedrooms, living rooms, and bathrooms, but also spaces within spaces, closets, drawers, organization boxes, etc.

All these rooms would be the shelter in which meanings are created about life outside and inside the domestic environment, thus being the locus where the construction of the human being unfolds, biologically and psychically. Bachelard builds the house on two essential foundations: centrality and verticality. The first

corresponds to the stability and intimacy that the house offers. The aspect of the individual's encounter with himself, his failures, successes, fears, and achievements. Verticality, on the other hand, the house shows a greater complexity. Related to the positioning of the rooms with two opposite heights: underground, in the configuration of the basement, and above the baseline of the house, with the attic.

As an analogy of human psychology, the attic would then be rationality, clarity, future planning, the space where it is possible to dream and to own a sense of security. At the extreme opposite position, the basement would represent obscurity, irrationality, and fears. To this psychic delineation of the basement, the author will say that he also "roots" the house in the earth (Bachelard, 2014, p. 110), only for that "partakes of subterranean force," related to the most primitive fears (Bachelard, 2014, pp. 18–19).

The house, as a dreamlike space, would be for Bachelard "our corner of the world. It is, as is often said, our first universe. It is a true cosmos" (p. 200). The author goes on to highlight the house as a place of protection that shelters day-dreaming and allows one to dream in peace, referring to the hut as a shelter that fights against storms "like a wolf" (p. 226).

Drawing a parallel to the verticality of the house, most contemporary homes no longer have many rooms vertically, and become more compact and horizontal, with apartments optimized for the new reduced models of families. In this context, the conceptualization of the house's environments can be applied to the maid's room, as more connected to the lower area of the house, the area where invisible services are performed, where utensils without continuous use are placed, and thus, the equivalent to Bachelard's basement.

The segregation of the maid's space in the domestic environment dates back centuries. Bringing the case of colonized countries as an indication of the process of constitution of this structure, it refers to the construction of slave quarters and the big house in Latin America, or slave quarters and the plantation houses in North America. The two spaces are closely related, but with opposite experiences. The home of the explorer and the hut of the exploited, cohabited in the same space. The "senzala" was a separate extension of the main house, where the enslaved took off the worker's cloak, and could wear an existence of their own, the closest that they would get of being individual beings.

Art in general, and specifically the paintings of the time, is an incredible window to visualize the lived reality. Observing more closely the work of Johann Moritz Rugendas, *Habitation of blacks* (between 1822 and 1825), as displayed in [Fig. 5](#), it is possible to see some specific elements of the exploitation and segregation heritage of the time. In the foreground, we can see the prevalence of women in the domestic scenario, taking care of the children and the house.

When delving into the details of the picture, one also perceives the scarcity of resources for the basic housing of individuals, with the enslaved themselves building their uncomfortable straw beds, with the elements available around them. Finally, the most veiled element of the painting, a detail that to a hasty eye can pass unnoticed: the white woman, an inhabitant of the "plantation house," watching life happen for those she subjugates.

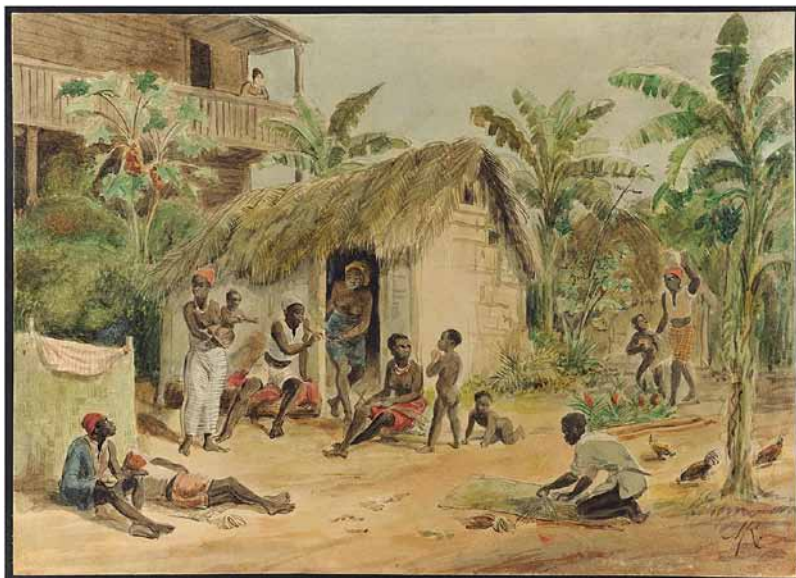


Fig. 5. *Habitação de negros*. RUGENDAS, Johann Moritz, 1802–1858.
Source: Casa Geyer/Museu Imperial/Ibram/MinC.

With the abolition of slavery, the resulting social changes and rearrangements over time, the space of the slave quarters started to acquire new forms, but never completely disappeared from the habitable scenario. In the Brazilian case, this construction turns into the “edicule,” a space at the bottom of the housing’s constructed land, and in which the main functionality was to house domestic service workers for the contractors’ house. The standard structure of these dwellings consisted of a bathroom and space for bunk beds, with some windows and usually an independent door so that workers did not need to move inside, or even close to their employers’ homes (Viana & Trevisan, 2016).

Advancing in the historical timeline, the buildings are remodeled once again, adapting to the demands of contemporary houses. The shed becomes a part of the house itself, but always in a position as far away as possible from the heart of the household, or the rooms where the bosses spend more time together. Anchored in historical-cultural segregation logics, the structure now comprises only one room, usually without ventilation and always close to the most undervalued areas of the home, the service area.

This new housing configuration is characterized as the famous maid’s room, or some of its other names: service room, back room, mess room, eviction room, and more symbolically the maid’s “little room,” as it is traditionally known in Portuguese. What do all these nomenclatures have in common? The character of the space in which the “unwanted” elements or leftovers of the house are allocated.

Another common nomenclature for this space, demonstrates its essence in the domestic environment, both in practical and design terms, as well as in

figurative ones. The so-called “reversible room” in housing projects, has the function of hiding everything you don’t want to see in the most valued areas of the house, where the family lives together and receives their guests. In these rooms, you can find cleaning and home maintenance tools, brooms, buckets, remains of old renovations, and parts that have no evident use and are kept stored for possible future demands. Anthropologist Donna Goldstein (2013) details the room in these new patterns as (p. 80):

This piece, previously intended for housing, is now only for use during the day. This is a room inevitably located behind the kitchen and laundry room, where, in general, only a small single bed can fit. The bathroom reveals the true status of the maid in this house. This cramped area barely has room for a shower and toilet. In the ones I’ve seen, it’s common to find a toilet without a seat, but when it exists, the architecture of the space means that, when you turn on the shower, the entire piece floods, including the seat. It is difficult, if not impossible, to give these spaces a clean and uncluttered appearance.

The maid’s room is detached from the rest of the house, as a subdivision of the domestic environment in a hierarchy of values. Hence, the family nucleus is concentrated in the central living rooms, and even when in their intimate moments in their bedrooms, these are always airy, with windows for natural light and the possibility of enjoying the sight of life outside those walls.

The location of the maid’s room already suggests, in a not-so-subtle way, the preference for its almost null presence, even with an entrance door to the apartment positioned with direct access to the service area. Through this entrance, in addition to the maid’s transit, also circulate the employees whose jobs are to maintain home systems, such as electricians and plumbers, that is, all those responsible for the tasks of dealing with malfunctions and “dirt” belonging to a house.

Leaving the apartment, this maid also has a limitation of movement within the building, directing herself to the “service elevators,” different from the “social elevators” that are dedicated to the residents of the building and their visitors. In a journalistic article published in 2014, Maria Lucia Solla describes the perception of her employee’s experience in the building where she lived in Brazil: “She had to go up and down in the service elevator, even though it was being used to take down the garbage from the apartments on all floors, the stuff from the renovation of some apartment and the dogs” (Solla, 2014).

Another situation, now in India, reaffirms this perception of the place of service workers in general, and of domestic servants. In 2022, a skyscraper in the city of Pune gained prominence in the Indian Express news, due to the establishment of a memo around the subject of the “undesirable” elements of the building routine for a given elevator. A notice pasted at the entrance to the building’s elevators read: “Milkman, newspaper & courier, distributor, laundry person, laborers, painters & pets are to use only lift ‘D’” (ISTTrends Desk., 2022).

The views opposed to a segregationist view argue that the separation of the maid’s living space from the structure of the house is a way of guaranteeing autonomy to this employee. However, this autonomy would be limited to the hierarchy of the home and the agreed or implicit rules for living together in the house. Therefore, it could be deduced that the maid would have unimpeded movement once she goes beyond the exit door of the building. Yet, this freedom

is still limited, and even figurative, since all other socio-economic and cultural limitations to its flow are imposed on them from this moment on.

Residents of middle- and upper-class apartments do not want to have their routines crossed by the opposite and overloaded reality of domestic servants. These workers directly reflect layers of historical inequality, and for those residents in their modern lives, it does not suit them to have them appearing in their rooms with custom furniture and passing thoroughly clean and expensive rugs.

Therefore, it is opportune to have a clear division of atmosphere for these workers, laying a line between those who are welcome in the main rooms, residents, visitors, and guests invited to the main rooms of the house, and on the other side the “others,” employees, menial workers and those responsible for maintaining the running of the house, couriers, and all those who operate serving the residents of the house.

The historical-cultural segregationist character of the maid’s space within homes is visually reflected in the physical attributes of this space. Not only is the divide between “us” and “others” exposed, but even more so is the hierarchy of individual values within these sites. Recovering the study carried out on the maid’s room in the Ataköy Apartment Blocks in Istanbul, Turkey (2011), it is observed that the modernization of life, with the arrival of appliances that facilitate the day-to-day maintenance of the home, also exposes this power rating inside the house.

The innovative object in question in the article was the washing machine. The arrival of this appliance in homes was later than others, such as the refrigerator, due to the abundance of cheap domestic labor. In the traditional structures of residences at the time (around the 1950s and the 1960s), the architects had not added a suitable space for the insertion of this object, so the solution, especially in the Ataköy building, was to fit the washing machine where the maid’s bathroom was, as it was an airier environment and already with operational plumbing (Gürel, 2009).

The conclusion deriving from this adaptation of modernity in traditional constructions of homes is that the maid was the figure who had to shrink and fit in, losing spaces already restricted for her existence to home appliances. The images in Figs. 6–8 taken in houses and apartments in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and show the multiplicity of uses of the maid’s room, or service room, representing this worker’s living space, along with materials and objects for occasional use by the House:

Having the visualization of these spaces in mind, [Bachelard’s proposals \(1957\)](#) about the internal dimensions of domestic spaces become clearer. This is complemented by [Foucault \(1984\)](#), in his defense of the impossibility of understanding individuals separately from the geographical aspects in which they are surrounded since geography is also historical. The location of constructions, and their arrangement, transform the way people interact and the roles they will assume in societies.

Both in the urban fabric and the rural environment, there is a list of actors’ positions according to geographical proximity and the extensions in which they circulate. Spaces can be defined by networks of relationships and meanings,



Fig. 6. Maid's Room and Food Pantry – Quintino – Rio de Janeiro – 2023.

to which the author will use trains as an example, meaning at the same time a means of transport from one point to another, as well as a place of quick coexistence, and a locus where people cross without creating links or attachments (Foucault, 1984).

These places Foucault names Heterotopias, or “other places.” It reflects a relational perspective to spaces, in direct consonance of order or disorder under the other sacralized spaces established. Even if physically locatable and always connected to the historical and cultural context of the period, these places are alternative spatial structures. It would abide a place composed of reflective mechanisms, like mirrors, says Foucault (1984):

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a place without a place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that is open on the other side of the surface; I am beyond, there where I am not, I am a shadow that gives me visibility of myself, that allows me to see myself there where I am absent. This is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia, since the mirror exists in reality, and exerts a kind of counteraction to the position I occupy. (p. 4)

Stretching the interpretation of heterotopic spaces, the maid's room would be one of those locations that hold multiplicities concerning the other surrounding structures. A room, determined as a room for temporary relaxation, privacy, and rest, in the context of the live-in maid, serves as an alert rest since it is allocated in the physical space of work. The bedroom consists of just one of the rooms in a house, along with others that perform different functions, such as the kitchen, the bathroom, and the living room.



Fig. 7. Maid's Room in Barra da Tijuca – Rio de Janeiro – 2023.

However, the maid's room represents a space composed of four walls that must contain a kind of replica of all the meanings performed in the other spaces in a house full of rooms. The bedroom is where individuals take off their everyday clothes, as well as their social masks necessary for interacting with others. In the service room, clothes are changed for more comfortable ones, but masks remain ready, with the possibility of being needed at any time of the day or night.

In the article published in the *New York Times* in 2011 (Toy, 2011), entitled "Dusting off the maid's room," Iva Spitzer, the executive vice president of the Corcoran Group, reports her perception of the adaptations made to the architecture of the maid's room, exhibiting changes in structure, modernization, but with no change in the relationship between intimacy and work overload: "They have a closet that you could fit a pair of sneakers and jacket in, and they have a sliver of a bathroom that is so small they couldn't fit the sink in the space, so the sink is in the bedroom." She goes on to report now regarding the maids' toilets "Instead of standard bathtubs, baths would have three-foot-wide tubs not big enough to sit down in."

It is evident that since the initial division of labor in global terms, many changes have occurred in societies. New segments of the population began to establish a presence in the public sphere, minorities walked toward guaranteeing their rights, families got reformulated, and concepts were reviewed. Even so, some individuals continue to be responsible for carrying the gross weight of the world.

These were entrusted with carrying this burden on their backs, so that the rest of the population could find unobstructed paths to conquer new horizons. This system was deeprooted, as a self-sustaining process: those who walk their lives



Fig. 8. Maid's Bathroom and Storage – Piedade – Rio de Janeiro – 2023.

removing obstacles out of the way so that others can move faster, and reach further distance, do not have the time, nor the energy, or the support to clear their own paths. At the same time, those who walk on a road free of these responsibilities have no interest in changing this scenario.

CONCLUSION

This chapter was born on the idea to expose an overview of the function of the maid that goes beyond the labor aspects, seeking to reach historical, cultural, social, and psychological layers of analysis. Supported by the concept of family, the figure of the maid also has bittersweet tones. There is a complicated mix between the emotional links created with family members, especially the children they are responsible for raising, while this relationship takes place in employability and hierarchy terms. Since this woman resides in her employers' residence and participates in the practical as well as the emotional day-to-day life of the house, the lines that separate this family from her own become blurred.

More than trying to answer questions as complex and multifaceted as those that arise throughout the article, the objective was precisely to point out questions that could take the discussion further. The proposal, then, is to contribute to the dialogue by adding more layers of observation, which serve to bring the multiple theories applicable to analyzes of domestic work closer to the practical reality experienced by these women.

To that end, some of the questions that operate as a guiding thread for future discussions run along the lines of: What is the size allowed for a domestic worker

to reach, and what elements of her personal experience can this woman keep for herself, once the closet only fits one pair of sneakers? Where can this woman wash her face at the end of the day and look in the mirror, to appreciate the passage of time in her expression lines, or the blush that the sun has given her cheeks, if the sink had to be repositioned in the room already so tight? And after all, what would that draw proposed to the children be like, about their perceptions of their homes? Would it be colorful and full of windows where natural light can reach her life? Would it have an external world composed of trees and sunny days?

These reflections will be valid insofar as they expand and include the voices of women domestic workers themselves. Thus, one of the greatest writers on the reality of racial, gender, and class oppression in Latin America, Carolina Maria de Jesus (1961), precisely because she writes from an empirical place of experience, dialogues:

I woke up at night and kept thinking about my life that seems to be a tragedy, we are born, and during existence, life becomes troubled. Now, I'm in the living room, the place I wanted to live. I left the favela at the time when the afflictions were mounting. Let's see what my life is going to be like here in the living room. (p. 35)

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